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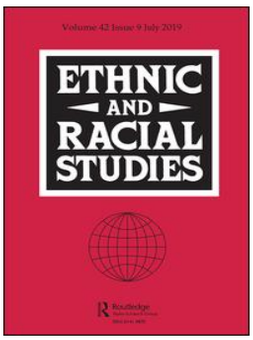

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Swedish surnames, British accents: passing among post-Soviet migrants in Helsinki

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ABSTRACT

In analysing efforts to pass as white, this article examines the ways racialized difference materializes on the bodies construed as "Eastern European". Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork among Russian-speaking migrants in Helsinki, it examines their attempts to inhabit whiteness through tactics of passing, such as changing their surnames, working on their accents, and adjusting how they dress. I argue that these efforts to pass as *not* "Russian" should be understood through the postcolonial formation of Europeanness, with its internal racialized division between (proper) Western Europeanness and (incomplete) Eastern Europeanness. The labour of approximating whiteness through passing draws attention to sites of racialized differentiation such as accent, audibility, language, surnames, and clothing. These efforts of attempting to pass for someone Russian speakers are not recognized as point to the structural racist hierarchies that refuse to attach value to their bodies.

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Introduction

In critical theory of race, the former "second world" is often a blank space on the map (however, see Böröcz 2017; Baker 2018; Krivonos 2018; Zorko 2018). Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is "too white" to be considered a postcolonial subject, yet is always "lagging behind" and "catching up" with Western Europe (Blagojević 2009; Zarycki 2014). Some research conceptualizes Eastern European migrants as "contiguous Others" (Dzenovska 2014; see also Lowe 2015), occupying a complex position in relation to whiteness and Europeanness. These are not the radical Others of Europe – the non-white subjects analysed as an opposite and constitutive of Europe itself (Said 1974; Fanon 2008); rather, contiguous Others have the potential to pass

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and convert their phenotypical whiteness into white capital, a condition unavailable to other racialized minorities. Yet Europe, as a colonial formation, is also construed through enactment of its internal hierarchies, and through symbolic orientalized boundaries between East and West, the former often being labelled as not "fully" European.

In this article, I nuance understanding of European whiteness by analysing young Russian-speaking migrants' efforts to approximate the norm of white Western body. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted between 2014 and 2016 in Helsinki, I analyse these migrants' attempts to inhabit whiteness through tactics of passing, such as changing their surnames, working on their accents, and adjusting how they dress. Russian speakers are the largest migrant group in Finland, racialized as Finland's Eastern Other, whose claims to whiteness are not always recognized (Krivonos 2018). I argue that their tactics of passing should be understood as attempts to gain proximity to the signifier of normative Europeanness (Hesse 2007), with reference to which Eastern Europe is positioned as the Other, or Europe's "incomplete self", to borrow Todorova's (1997) terms. These tactics suggest that even bodies that appear phenotypically white do not live up to the standards of hegemonic whiteness and Europeanness, and that these migrants feel they *must* invest in their bodies to approximate the white Western body if they want to achieve social advancement after migration. These individual efforts of attempting to pass for someone they are not recognized as point to the structural racist hierarchies that refuse to see their bodies as valuable.

If racialized groups are always produced on social grounds, how is racialized difference construed on ostensibly white bodies? Passing has typically been analysed to show how non-white subjects cross the black–white colour line to attain social mobility and escape violence (Piper 1992; Larsen 1994; Harvey 2017), whereas this article focuses on internal differentiation within whiteness and Europe itself. I argue that to analyse young Russian-speaking migrants' efforts to *not* be seen as "Russian" and to pass as white, Europeanness must be understood as a postcolonial formation of whiteness, with internal hierarchies and symbolic geographies that distinguish between Western Europe as Europe proper, and Europe's "incomplete self", Eastern Europe. This requires critique of race as a product of modernity/coloniality (Mignolo 2000) to be placed in dialogue with discussion on Eastern Europe's position in modernity itself. Thus, this article contributes to analysis of race in the context of postcolonial and postsocialist Europe (Böröcz 2017; Ivasiuc 2017; Baker 2018).

In what follows, I discuss how passing is entangled with historically constituted subject formations, the problems of passing, Europeanness as a colonial formation, and the position of Eastern Europe and Finland within normative Europeanness and whiteness. I then present my findings on how young Russian-speaking migrants try to improve their accents, and change their surnames and ways of dressing in attempting to be seen as not Russian. I

conclude by outlining my contribution to debates on whiteness and race in Europe.

Bodies, whiteness and passing

Passing is a powerful tool for thinking about people's efforts to disidentify and distance themselves from the subject positions they occupy. The concept has been invoked to address racialized and gendered positionings (Butler 1990; Stone 1991; Larsen 1994; Ahmed 1999; Harvey 2017; Tudor 2017). Passing has been typically theorized as "passing to privilege", that is, crossing the colour line to access white privilege and escape racialized violence (Stone 1991).

Passing has also been more broadly conceptualized as "making oneself readable as privileged from a discriminated positioning" (Tudor 2017, 21) and attempting to be someone one is not (Skeggs 1997), although Ahmed (1999) notes that conceptualizations of passing may be problematic if they reproduce the idea of an essential self. Importantly, passing has been argued to be not an individual act, but contingent on prior histories and the circulation of racialized and gendered notions. Perceptions of bodies are colonially conditioned constructions rather than unmediated reflections of pre-existing differences (Rosa 2018, 3). "Historicity" lies beneath the skin: underneath the body schema is a historico-racial schema, which is racialized by the white gaze (Fanon 2008, 91–92). Bodies are racialized subject formations rooted in distinctions between Europeanness and othered non-Europeanness. Extending Fanon's argument, Ahmed (2007) contends that white bodies have become the "bodies-at-home", fitting spaces shaped by histories of colonial dominance. In other words, the world is already given and inherited through colonial histories before the arrival of individual racialized bodies (Ahmed 2007; Fanon 2008). To borrow from Judith Butler (1990), the act that one does has been already going on before one arrived on the scene: "there is no doer behind the deed". To pass or allow someone else to pass is not an individual decision or effort.

Yet passing requires considerable efforts and performative changes in behaviour, speech, accent and dress (Sion 2014; Wara and Munkejord 2018). It is not the same as becoming, and may always end in failure (Ahmed 1999). In analysing British working-class women's desire *not* to be recognized as working class and to pass as middle class, Skeggs (1997) demonstrates that the problem with passing is that the person attempting to pass can be always found out. The politics of passing involves anxieties and insecurities, since passing may not be legitimized by hegemonic others who have the power to judge and evaluate. The fear of "being caught out" and being seen structures the politics of passing. Furthermore, passing does not challenge structural inequalities and hierarchies of judgement that require some to pass and not others, which makes it into a tool for disciplining bodies. For instance,

the middle class and white subjects do not need to pass because their capital already exists (Skeggs 1997, 91). Thus, rather than destabilizing or transgressing the system that makes passing necessary, passing secures and reproduces relations of power, as the criteria used to decide who passes and who fails remain intact (Ahmed 1999). Passing is based on the false promise of inclusion that only reproduces violent structures, which is why some scholars and activists have called to actively *not* pass (Stone 1991).

Existing research draws attention to how Eastern European migrants' whiteness is not given, but must be performed and claimed, often unsuccessfully (Moroşanu and Fox 2013; Krivonos 2018). Feminist migration research demonstrates that such efforts are also gendered, as Eastern European migrant women struggle to resist stigmatization, racialization and sexualization (Diatlova 2019; Krivonos and Diatlova forthcoming). For example, Wara and Munkejord (2018) suggest that migrant Russian women's attempts to "blend in" in Norway by no longer wearing make-up or skirts are a form of bodily (re)orientation to avoid feeling stigmatized and out of place. Linda Lapiņa's (2018) autobiographical account of passing as a Dane captures the position of Eastern European migrants, who labour on their bodies to become whiter and more Western, even though their bodies already have the potential for conditional passing that non-white Others do not have. This research also suggests that, for some, the ability to pass as white is contingent on maintaining other bodies as "immigrant", "diverse" or "exotic". Rather than showing individual accomplishments or failures, the analysis of passing reveals structural racial contexts that force non-white and not-quite-white subjects to invest in approximating the norm of whiteness to be recognized as peers.

I argue that racialization of Eastern European migrants and their efforts at passing should be understood against the backdrop of Europeanness as a colonial formation of whiteness, with internal racialized hierarchies between Western and Eastern Europe. In other words, there is a need to further interrogate the historical-racial schema underneath their white skins (Fanon 2008, 91).

Whiteness assembled in colonialism: Europe, Finland and Eastern Europe

Barnor Hesse (2007) has drawn attention to contradictory theorization of race, which has discredited it as a biological signifier yet continues to reduce it to descriptions of visible, corporeal differences. Conflating race with skin pigmentation tends to exclude Eastern Europeans from this discussion, who are instead analysed through the lens of ethnicity (see also Baker 2018). Previous scholarly work has emphasized that racial categories have been constituted through European colonial history and the contested production of

modernity itself (Hesse 2007), or what Walter Mignolo (2000) calls the "modern/colonial world system". In considering the colonial heritage of race, Europeanness becomes visible as a primary signifier in the logic of race, contrasted with Othered non-Europeanness. This process is relational, whereby non-European constitutive outsiders sustain the meaning of "Europe" itself (Fanon 2008). Race can thus be understood as historically and institutionally rooted in the rearticulation of colonial distinctions between normative Europeanness and Othered non-Europeanness (Hesse 2007; Lentin 2008; Rosa 2018).

The contemporary conflation of Europeanness and whiteness is, in fact, based on marginalization of non-European forms of whiteness (Bonnett 1998). Whiteness became a fetish for Europeans, who invested obsessively in whiteness as a specifically racial category of privilege. Thus, rather than simply a matter of skin pigmentation, whiteness was assembled as a structure of advantage tied to European colonial dominance. Through this process, all Europeans became white, regardless of their actual skin pigmentation (Bonnett 1998). Scholarly work in the context of the US migration history has also demonstrated the porous boundaries of whiteness and how certain populations "became white" or received the "wages of whiteness" through racism against Black people (Du Bois 1935; Ignatiev 1995; Brodkin 1998). This points to the inherent historical instability and porosity of whiteness and its dependence on other marginalized positions.

I suggest that this discussion should be placed in dialogue with recent work in and on Eastern Europe, which will help to further destabilize Europe and whiteness as artificially uniform entities, while demonstrating the persistence of the signifiers of Europe, race and whiteness in claims to "true" Europeanness. As Ana Ivasiuc (2017) argues, the argument on racial Europeanization (Goldberg 2009) implicitly posits it as "*Western* Europeanization", erasing Eastern Europe from Europe itself. Postcolonial theorization of the CEE region draws attention to spatial and temporal configurations of Europeanness based on the colonial and racial logic of difference *within* Europe. Scholarship on postcolonialism and race in the context of postsocialism and the CEE analyses the inner-European demarcations of Europe, the orientalist production of "the East" and the symbolic mapping of civilization *within* the European continent (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Wolff 1994; Boatcă 2010). According to this critique, "Eastern Europe" is a product of colonialist othering by Western Europe and, like the Oriental, has been constructed as a violent and primitive Other. In other words, the region's relation to Western Europe is always addressed through "ideologies of Eastness", that is, through references to "eastern" aspects of the region's imagined identity (Zarycki 2014). "Eastern Europe" is theorized as a product of Western elites and the Enlightenment, the foundations of which are entangled with practices of colonial dominance beyond the European continent (Wolff 1994; Sušová-Salminen 2012).

Within the region itself, racial hierarchies and claims to whiteness, often vis-à-vis Roma people, have been used to assert full Europeanness (Boatcă 2007; Ivasiuc 2017; Țîștea 2020). Thus, the boundaries of Europeanness are racially policed from within to demarcate belonging to Europe "proper" (Boatcă 2007; Dzenovska 2014). In addition, since the collapse of the socialist regime, post-socialist subjects have been seen as representatives of failed socialist modernity who have no other choice but to catch up with the only possible modernity of neoliberal capitalism. Eastern Europeans are thus considered to be secondary Europeans who need to be assisted toward fully-fledged Europeanness. These depictions, particularly visible during the EU's enlargement into eastern Europe, have gone hand in hand with racialization and the portrayal of new or potential EU member states as being in need of assistance toward complete Europeanness (Böröcz et al. 2001).

These arguments are not intended to homogenize the eastern European region, as subjects occupy various positions of power within the logic of European coloniality. Writing on the position of Russia in the context of global coloniality, a country from where most of my research participants had come, Madina Tlostanova (2003) argues that it has adopted the position of a subaltern empire of modernity. On the one hand, Russia has constituted itself as a colonial empire with a civilizing mission in relation to its own colonized others (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). On the other hand, it is viewed as a not-quite-Western and non-capitalist empire of modernity, considered as the Other to the West. This line of thought helps reveal how racialization functions in Europe, marked by an internal East–West distinction.

In addition to the hierarchical grading of the European space itself, young post-Soviet subjects' struggles for Europeanness take place not in the heart of global Western modernity but at the eastern limit of Western Europe in Finland. Finland has had a historically precarious relation to whiteness, and an in-between position straddling the East/West divide (Keskinen 2014). Although it is often thought of as innocent of racism and colonialism, racial thinking has played an important role in its nation building and construction of national identities (Vuorela 2009). In the racial science taxonomies of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Finns were categorized as part of the "Mongolian race". As a result, some Finnish scientists made considerable efforts to prove the whiteness and Europeanness of the Finnish people. These counter-arguments to prove that Finns were white and Europeans, and racially unrelated to Mongolians were based largely on racism against the indigenous Sámi. In addition, Finnishness, as an opposite to Russianness, was gradually constructed during the process of building Finland into an independent *Western* nation belonging to the Western European cultural tradition (Keskinen 2014). "Ideologies of Eastness", to borrow from a slightly different discussion (Zarycki 2014), have been used to racialize and

portray Russians as Eastern, more traditional and less advanced Others in Finland.

This discussion of race and whiteness in "peripheralized" Europe advances understanding of the mechanisms that undergird racialization and production of whiteness beyond the white–black binary (Gonzalez-Sobrino and Goss 2019). My aim is to trace circulation of the signifier of Europe (Hesse 2007) and the constitution of subject formations rooted in distinctions between normative Europeanness and Othered Eastern Europeanness.

An ethnography of young Russian speakers' lives in Helsinki

My analysis draws on an ethnographic study among Russian-speaking migrants in Helsinki between 2014 and 2016, for which I interviewed a total of 54 participants (20–32 years old; 20 male and 34 female). They came mainly from Russia and Estonia, which are the two largest migrant groups in Finland, as well as Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite their heterogeneity and their own self-identifications, many had experienced being homogenized and grouped as "Russians". All but one participant from Russia came from a white majority background. I met my participants through municipal career counselling services, integration and language courses, education and job fairs, and job search courses.

My research participants had diverse migration histories: some had grown up in Finland, some had become naturalized citizens, and others had moved to Finland recently. All but one had been born outside Finland. Most had already obtained vocational or higher degrees in their home countries. The majority had previously been university students, or white-collar workers. While some narrated their migration to Finland as an adventure and an opportunity, many felt that although their jobs had provided them with recognition and respect as white-collar workers, they had seen few prospects in their home countries, and hoped that the "West" would provide them with a more modern lifestyle and better living standards (Krivonos and Näre 2019). I analysed my interview transcripts and ethnographic notes using a close reading method (Watson and Wilcox 2000), which meant reading and organizing the transcripts in dialogue with theoretical concepts that emerged from the data.

Young Russian speakers' struggles for whiteness take place in the context of particular histories between Finland and Russia and the subsequent racialization of Russians as Finland's Eastern Other, which nevertheless point to connections with European structures of race and whiteness. The historical legacy of relations between Finland and the Russian Empire/Soviet Union, such as Finland being part of the Russian Empire until 1917, Finland's Civil War and World War II, has led to Russian-speaking migrants and minorities being racialized as the Other to the normative whiteness of Finland (Krivonos 2018). As a result, many Russian-speaking migrants whom I interviewed had

had to move to positions of lower social status or unemployment in Finland. Around 25 per cent of Russian-speaking migrants are unemployed or have jobs in low-paid sectors such as cleaning, construction, care and logistics (Statistics Finland 2013), which do not always match their levels of education and work experience.

Getting rid of "open vowels": learning to sound right

One day Alisa messaged me that she would like to meet and have a chat about a new course in the employment office that she had started to attend. Alisa was unemployed and had to attend a course as part of the activation programme, which used to be a policy, whereby the unemployed had to be engaged in work-related activities to be eligible for unemployment benefits. Although Alisa had a university education and knowledge of Finnish, she had only been able to secure a precarious, low-paid job in the service sector, which she had left hoping to find a better offer.

On our way to a café, she mentioned a discussion in which she had participated during the course. She talked proudly about not having a Russian accent when speaking English and Finnish, yet she referred to small details that revealed her as being Russian:

> In these courses, everyone was surprised I am from Russia since I don't have a Russian accent when I speak Finnish and English. They told me that when I speak English, I speak with a British accent and the only thing that reveals the fact I am from Eastern Europe are too open vowels. My dream is to get rid of these vowels and speak beautiful British English. Same with Finnish: I would like to get rid of those instances when I pronounce words like an Eastern European. (Field diary)

Alisa's potential to pass as white and non-Russian is a relative privilege not possessed by some other migrants and racialized minorities. She was narrating the story with a sense of pride that her Russianness was unnoticed. Yet even in this position, she gave detailed and minor, yet what she saw as significant, indicators of her "Eastern Europeanness", such as "open vowels". These little "open vowels" were a source of insecurity and doubt that she might become audible, and therefore visible, as an "Eastern European" (Rosa 2018). Alisa was aware of instances where she occupied space in a different way owing to her accent. Pronouncing words with "too open vowels" placed her in relation to a marked, racialized and visible position juxtaposed against "beautiful British English" or "Finnish with no accent". Within this logic, a "beautiful British accent" is a marker of global uncontested whiteness. Rather than being ordinary and invisible, the position of speaking English or Finnish without an "Eastern European" accent was highly visible to Alisa (Ahmed 2007). Her quote suggests her attempts to gain total control of her

pronunciation, which constantly threatened to slip away. Her awareness of how she was positioned through her "open vowels" highlights how racialization works, as a process of reifying and fixing bodies in space through embodied signs such as accent. Audibility and accents are recruited to homogenize and racialize certain populations as "different". The regime of audibility establishes a hierarchy of more or less normative Europeanness (Rosa 2018).

Audibility was a matter of concern to many young Russian-speaking migrants I encountered in Helsinki. Having a Russian accent or speaking Russian while navigating public spaces imposed difference on the bodies of those racialized and homogenized as "Russian" through their language. Their efforts to sound "right" as an individual accomplishment should be understood in the context of everyday racism faced by these migrants (Essed 1991). Andrey told me his story of being assaulted in a bar, and the limit of his phenotypical whiteness:

> Once, in a bar, a girl was flirting with me. When I said something, she asked, "Where are you from?" Clearly, she was referring to my accent. "Russia", I responded. Then she just told me to my face, just to my face, "I hate you Russians". I said, "So who do you like then? You like Arabs and Somalis?"

Apparently everyday, simple accents and intonations are politically loaded. Andrey's accent was the surface on which his otherness was inscribed, triggering the "where are you from?" question. "Where are you from?" is central to the process of racialization, where bodies are recognized as being out of place (Puar 2008; Creece 2019). The voice is thus an exterior surface, not unlike the skin, on which racial hierarchies are carved (Chow 2014).

This story also foregrounds whiteness as a contingent hierarchy, as Andrey was both racialized as a foreigner and a "Russian", and himself racialized non-white Others to make a claim to whiteness (Krivonos 2018). In defending himself against the racial stigma, Andrey himself reproduced racism by referring to other non-white subjects, mobilizing Black/Muslim racialization to ascend the hierarchy of whiteness. As a result, he himself was complicit in the structures of racism that devalued and dehumanized him. Andrey attempted to redefine the boundaries of whiteness through claiming a higher racial status by designating non-white Others to the bottom of the hierarchy. This draws attention to the fact that the process of racialization is always relational, where claiming membership of whiteness is contingent on keeping non-white Others in inferior status.

Similarly to Andrey's case, where racialization took place through accent, Egor mentioned his encounter with two Finnish girls on a Helsinki street:

> I was walking on the street, and two girls were looking at me. They first looked very friendly and smiled at me. But when I passed by, they heard that I was speaking Russian on the phone, so they threw a chocolate wrapper at me and said: "Yuck, smelly Russian!"

Egor's story demonstrates how the regimes of audibility and visibility intersect (Fortier 2018). In this case, his "audible visibility" (Toivanen 2014) as a Russian speaker in a public space made him visible. Language and accents are at play in producing otherness. Young Russian speakers' tactics of passing, such as working on their accent or not speaking Russian in public spaces, should be understood against this backdrop of vulnerabilities becoming visible through the regime of audibility. For example, Alexander told me: "Sometimes I do not pick up the phone when I am on public transport when I see my Russian friend is calling me" (also Sion 2014). Gaining white capital does not come at no cost, but requires the labour of becoming unidentifiable as an Eastern European by adjusting one's accent or *not* speaking. The fact that migrants feel that they must do this labour individually in order to be seen as peers point to the structures of racism that attach value only to certain kinds of bodies. Accents are powerful signifiers of racial and colonial difference.

Inna told me her story of becoming audible as a foreigner in her workplace. Accent could be a strong cause of concern and insecurity, despite having sufficient language skills to get a service job, as she mentioned when talking about her two-day job as a salesperson during the Christmas sales: "The customers can hear your accent. They *hear* you are a *maahanmuuttaja* [foreigner], and I am afraid this is why they do not want to buy from me because they do not trust me." Language then is a stratified power formation reproducing racialized embodiments.

These examples of being racialized through accent challenge human capital theories, which see language skills as a technical property and personal responsibility of individuals, rather than as embedded within wider, historically contingent and racially structured relations of power. As Rosa (2018) argues, language learning is seen solely from the perspective of accumulating cultural and linguistic capital, thereby reproducing *racial* capitalism which devalues certain accents and intonations.

Sticky Russian surnames and "beautiful Swedish names"

One day, Alisa asked me to print her CV and a job application. As we got to my office that evening and I sat in front of my computer to print her documents, I noticed her surname, which I had thought was her pseudonym on social media. My field diary reads:

> While clicking "Print", I comment that she has a beautiful surname. "Of course it is beautiful. That is because I have chosen it myself." Alisa then explained that when she got her Finnish citizenship, she also changed her surname: "I just googled *Beautiful Swedish surnames* and picked the one I liked the most from the list. My name is also quite international, especially if I change a couple of

> letters and its spelling, which I also did." She then added that employers had started inviting her for job interviews more often since then. (Field diary)

As a result of the historical legacy of Swedish rule in Finland until 1809, Swedishness is associated with nobility and upper-classness in Finland (Kolehmainen 2017). "Swedes are the elite here", Alisa kept repeating. Her efforts to pass by changing her surname were narrated against the backdrop of her own precarious position in Finland, with a lack of access to respectable jobs and her inability to valorize her labour power and cultural capital as a university-educated person. When I first met her, she was unemployed and was attending a course at the employment office, and after two years her situation had hardly changed. Alisa's story points to her awareness of how Finland's racialized structures of class and hierarchies work, as she had tried to move upwards by changing her surname specifically to a "Swedish" one. Against the backdrop of the high symbolic value of the "Swedish surname" and its uncontested whiteness, the vignette illustrates Alisa's labour to pass as white and acquire white capital by changing her surname. She changed her Russian surname into an uncontested global marker of whiteness. These efforts point to who she did *not* want to be seen as. By embodying nationalities and global geographies, names and surnames become "sticky" and attached to racialized bodies (Ahmed 2004). Names and surnames mark bodies, assigning them a place within racialized hierarchies of value. By being marked as Swedish or a Swedish-speaking Finn through her surname and getting rid of her Russian accent, Alisa's body gained value as it was distanced from a marked and stigmatized position that gave little access to recognition. Alisa sees these efforts as her own individual project and effort, something that she must do *herself* to achieve social mobility. This individualization of struggle point to Finland's structural inequalities which consistently assigns the privilege to the bodies racialized as white.

Picking a Swedish surname allowed Alisa to gain more value, not only in the national context of Finland but also globally. She did not necessarily try to pass as a Finn. Two years before the episode in my office, Alisa had already shared her plans to change her surname to a "more international", again, specifically Swedish one:

> Until I tell the people I am Russian, nobody can guess I am Russian. I am too dark. People think I am French, Italian, Spanish – but not Russian. So I just decided for myself that no matter where I will live in the future, I need to take an international surname, preferably a Swedish one. Unfortunately, all these stereotypes do play a strong role. I have to adapt. Of course, I don't like the fact that in order to survive I have to make so many changes. I have to adjust … Just today at the courses they told us that in 70 per cent of cases the employers won't even look at a CV with a foreign name.

Interestingly, Alisa saw being "darker" than what is stereotypically imagined as "Russian" as possessing more valuable bodily capital, associating her with Western European nations. This association with Italians, Spaniards and French gave her a feeling that she could pass as white by taking an international "Swedish" surname. Here, the attempts to pass as white are tied to gaining international capital, which would be recognized globally. Her references to her looks suggest that a dark complexion can be associated with belonging to Western Europe, which shows the inconsistency of whiteness. In fact, she saw her lack of phenotypical fairness as a relative advantage. It is precisely her relative and little "darkness" as compared to Russian "fairness" that allows her to pass as white and claim belonging to the imaginative space of Western Europe.

Alisa's story thus illustrates that ideas about Russians looking "whiter" than some people from Western Europe, which themselves are based on a norm of white Slavic Russianness, do not guarantee membership of whiteness as a structural position of advantage and privilege. Rather, as Alisa herself pointed out, whiteness is produced through associations with Europeanness (Mills 1997; Bonnett 1998), and specifically *Western* Europeanness. Within this logic, it is possible to become "international" – or in fact properly European and Western – by picking a white Swedish surname. As recent research has argued, white Swedish migrants' racial and class privilege enables and facilitates their global mobility, and their whiteness is recognized globally (Lundström 2014), unlike the experience of Russian-speaking migrants who lose their white privilege after migration (Krivonos 2018). My research participants' efforts can thus be understood as individual tactics of the non-powerful to adapt because they are unable to capitalize on their positioning (De Certeau 1984). Unlike the strategies of the powerful, their tactics have more to do with constraints than possibilities (Skeggs 2004, 10). As Alisa kept repeating, "I have to adapt, I have to adjust."

Efforts to pass by working on their accents and changing their names when possible were also mentioned by Alexey and Marina, who had moved to Finland together as a family. Marina was an Ingrian Finn with a Finnish surname.[1] Like Alisa, they shared their plans to change Alexey's surname:

> Alexey will take my surname when we get Finnish passports. Also, he can make his name into more Finnish and neutral. So he will become some "Alex Tervonen" and nobody will distinguish him. We will live here for a couple more years, we will get rid of the accent, and everything will be good. This is our strategy.

Similarly to what I showed in the previous vignettes, racialization takes place through a surname "sticking" to a body, assigning it a place within global hierarchies of value. Alexey and Marina reveal a normative understanding of Finnishness, where being a Finn is equated with "neutrality", or simply with

whiteness as the invisible and the ordinary. For them, becoming naturalized Finnish citizens would take place simultaneously with attempting to pass as white Finns by changing their surnames. Unlike Alisa, whose strategy was to gain international capital, they attempt to approximate whiteness through disappearance and invisibility, that is, changing their surnames to one of the popular Finnish surnames. Becoming included in a nation thus requires more than compliance with formal legal requirements for naturalization and acquiring legal status as a citizen. Race and nation are never really separate (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). For instance, the contemporary master-narrative of Finland as a homogeneous nation state is based on assimilating Finland's historical minorities, such as the Roma and Sámi people, by changing their names to more "Finnish" ones (Leinonen 2012, 215). These concerns and attempts to change names should also be understood in light of Larja et al.'s (2012) field experiment, which reveals that job seekers with Russian names have to send twice as many job applications as applicants with Finnish names in order to be invited to interviews (see also Ahmad 2019). Marina's statement that "nobody will distinguish him" suggests their feeling of the need to make one's Russianness less visible.

Social and cultural positioning stick to a body and generate disidentification, doubt and unease. Changing one's surname demonstrates the work that young Russian-speaking migrants deem necessary to become included in normative Finnishness, Europeanness and whiteness.

Gender, sexuality and passing

Efforts to pass must be legitimated by those in power; therefore, passing entails the insecurity of being found out. The following excerpt illustrates both gendered tactics of passing and how these tactics may fail to become valorized:

Polina: I decided that I will be myself in Finland, not to dress up in a vulgar way, be careful with men, that is, to be quiet and adequate.
Daria: Did anyone ever mention to you that you are vulgar or what?
Anna: Not really, but I just keep it in my head that Russian women are seen as competitors here; a Russian woman looks like a queen even in the afternoon, as though she is going to the theatre. This is why I always dress up in a modest way – I don't want to look vulgar.
Polina: For instance, we went to a restaurant with my (Finnish) boyfriend; it was an international group of people. I thought that I don't feel like wearing just a T-shirt and jeans to go out, so I was wearing a classic black pencil dress. I mean, it was not vulgar at all, everything covered up, and I did my hair nicely. So one girl told me: "Why on earth are you decked out like that?!" I felt so upset – what did I do wrong?

This interview excerpt illustrates gendered processes of racialization (Krivonos and Diatlova forthcoming), the elusiveness yet the solid effects of whiteness. It demonstrates Russian-speaking women's continuous labour to *not* look "Russian", which they repeatedly associate with "vulgarity". Excessive sexuality is often seen as a marker of Russian femininity, as it has been continuously associated with the stigma of "prostitution" (Diatlova 2019). As a result, Polina's and Anna's lives are structured by the knowledge of how their bodies are seen. Polina and Anna put effort into marking their distinctions and passing as non-Russian by consuming markers of respectable white femininity, such as "a classic black pencil dress … not vulgar at all". These practices had not become habitual; they had to "keep it in my head", as Anna said. But even then, they do not manage to pass. These efforts and knowledge of what it means to be a white woman may not engender approval (Skeggs 1997). Their bodies are policed by those with legitimacy and power to judge them, including white Finnish women.

The vignette demonstrates the gendered and contextual construction of whiteness, its fluidity and evasiveness. The structures of race and gender make Polina and Anna feel that it is their own individual responsibility to police their looks to be recognized as respectable white women. These are the same structures of whiteness and gender that excluded Polina from a "casual" setting that she was made to feel like she had misjudged. Despite the effort to look respectable, a norm of white Western female body she tried to approximate is not solid but evasive and constructed contextually. In other words, it is not enough to simply start wearing a classic dress to pass as valuable since norms of whiteness continuously exclude certain subjects depending on the intersection with other categories of difference. While whiteness is evasive and shifting, it has solid effects such as, for example, being publicly judged for wearing something deemed inappropriate. The idea of what an emancipated Nordic femininity should look like may further reinforce racialization of Eastern European women who supposedly do not fit into the Nordic project of gender equality and women's liberation (Keskinen 2014; Krivonos and Diatlova forthcoming). Femonationalism feeds into the marginalization of non-European Others, who supposedly lag behind the norms of what liberated women should look and be like (Farris 2017).

Conclusions

Although Europe has been taken as a central signifier in understanding race, such discussion has developed separately from research on the orientalist production of Eastern Europe and racialized hierarchies within Europe itself. By producing racialized markers, *Western* Europe has established itself as Europe 'proper'. In this article, I have placed the two theoretical discussions in dialogue in order to understand what it means to be a white subject of

value by analysing young Russian-speaking migrants' efforts to pass as white. My research participants' narratives make clear that they do not live their ostensible whiteness "as a habit" (Ahmed 2007, 156). Rather, their difference is marked and remarkable, and they struggle to valorize their bodies as white bodies of value. For them, whiteness is not invisible, as they have learnt what labour it takes to pass. I have argued that my research participants' efforts to pass as *not* "Russian" should be understood through the postcolonial formation of Europeanness, with its internal racialized division between proper (Western) Europeanness and incomplete (Eastern) Europeanness.

These efforts draw attention to the ways racial difference is produced and attached to bodies. Instances where my research participants tried to pass as *not* Russian reveal sites of racialized differentiation, such as accent, language, surnames, and dress, beyond colour-coded forms. Regardless of young Russian-speakers' heterogeneity, various signs of racialized difference are recruited to construct and homogenize "Eastern Europeanness" or "Russianness". The process of racializing Eastern European bodies through social identifications takes place through assigning bodies the essentialized markers of dress, audibility, accent, and surnames. Accent and audibility are particularly remarkable aspects of racialization of a heterogeneous group that could not be classified through appearance or phenotype. While the ability to pass is a relative privilege that other non-white subjects may not have, whiteness remains evasive yet solid in its effects. Acquiring certain markers of whiteness may not be enough to be recognized as a white subject of value and lack legitimacy. The white Western body then only exists to Russian speakers as something to be pursued rather than a destination that can be reached. Thus, their agency to pass is lived as a very limited resource. While aspiring to whiteness and trying to pass, young Russian-speaking migrants also reproduce normative European whiteness – including racism against non-white Others to ascend the racial hierarchy (Krivonos 2018). The instances where they attempt to pass show how the paradigms of difference are embodied, and racial hierarchies are maintained.

The desire to be read as a white Western body points to the workings and violence of race and differing abilities to navigate social space even for the bodies that appear as phenotypically "white". Young Russian speakers feel that their social advancement in Finland is only possible through their individual labour of passing and their own effort of getting rid of the markers of non-Europeanness or othered Eastern Europeanness. The fact that my research participants feel this individual responsibility for sounding and looking "right" to be regarded as peers shows structural racism and the refusal to attach value to Eastern European bodies. The potential to pass should not shy attention away from the fact that racial structures continue to produce the need to pass for some and not for others. While some of these migrants may indeed end up passing as white in certain contexts, structural racism that

persistently marginalizes markers of non-Europeanness or othered Eastern Europeanness does not cease to exist. At the same time, the false promise of passing only reinforces racial hierarchies, and subjects who make an effort to pass remain complicit in reproducing racial violence regardless of whether they end up passing or not. These findings draw attention to the role of racialized Eastern European Others in "purifying" and reproducing European whiteness, and playing the dominance game as they suffer from the effects of racial domination themselves. Escape from racialization is only possible by overthrowing racial hierarchy rather than attempting to fit within it in a better place.

Note

1. Ingrian Finns are the descendants of seventeenth to early twentieth century Finnish immigrants to the Ingria region (now the area around St Petersburg).

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